

COMPARING THE POLITICS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICAN AND  
CANADIAN CITIES:  
THE MYTH OF THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

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It is, perhaps, a bit disingenuous to criticise a book with over 25 years worth of hindsight at ones disposal. At the same time, it is a testament to the impact of *The Myth of the North American City* that we see fit to revisit the issues and arguments raised by Goldberg and Mercer (1986) today. The book is emblematic of a persistent belief in Canada that our norms, culture, and institutions differ substantially from our populous neighbour to the south. Unfortunately, the book is also emblematic of a mindset that rules out the possibility for real, constructive, comparison of cities in the US and Canada, and, more importantly, the use of theory across borders. In this paper I challenge some of the tenants of Goldberg and Mercer's work as they relate to the politics of urban development in Canadian and American cities. The politics of urban development touches on two important aspects of the authors' argument: first, the existence of distinctive 'American' and 'Canadian' political cultures; and second, the purported institutional differences defined by the north-south divide.

I do not argue in favour of a 'continental' city. In fact, I accept the authors' argument that one archetype cannot reflect the diversity among North American cities. I also allow that important differences exist in our institutions and political culture at the aggregate national level. However, such distinctions at the aggregate level are but a few of the variables shaping cities in the two countries. The differences between cities in the US and Canada that do exist are not determined solely by their location north or south of the 49th parallel as Goldberg and Mercer claim. Rather, the cultures and institutions that define cities and local government vary throughout both countries. There is no 'Canadian' and no 'American' archetypal city anymore than there is a North American one, or a Mexican one.<sup>1</sup> Accepting that this is the case does not preclude fruitful comparison between cities in the two countries, nor does it prohibit the development of useful theories and theoretical frameworks for explaining the politics and development of our cities. In fact, this diversity offers a robust tableau for innovative comparative research on urban politics in Canada and the US.

This paper will demonstrate how the political culture of urban development politics, and the laws and institutions that govern urban development vary significantly *within* each country, and how many Canadian jurisdictions share more in common with American jurisdictions than with fellow Canadian ones--and *vice versa*. To support these claims, I draw on existing empirical literature--primarily case studies of individual cities--my own past research on the politics of urban development in Canadian cities, and the laws, regulations, and legislation that governs urban development in both countries.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The following section provides a brief account of Goldberg and Mercer's arguments concerning institutional and political cultural difference between the US and Canada, and how these differences relate to the politics of urban development in cities on each side of the border. It also outlines three assertions the authors make regarding the urban form and development of Canadian and American cities. The second and third sections challenge the authors' statements regarding the differences in political culture and institutional differences respectively. For these two sections, I move away from the aggregate national focus of Goldberg and Mercer, focusing instead on differences between individual cities, states, and provinces. The fourth section addresses the three assertion outlined in section one in light of the findings elaborated in section two and three. Lastly, the conclusion summarises my arguments and findings. Political cultural and institutional differences pervade cities in the US and Canada, but the border is not the main determinant of these differences, nor does difference prevent comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> Mexico being one of many other states within North America that the authors omit from their discussion.

## 1. Cultural and Institutional Difference in Canadian and American Cities

All of Goldberg and Mercer's (1986) arguments and conclusions revolve around their belief that aggregate national differences between American and Canadian political culture and institutions substantially shape the politics, policy, and form of their respective cities. The authors purport to shift from this macro-level perspective to an urban one midway through their book. However, they continue to rely heavily on national demographic data to illustrate their points throughout. What comparative data on individual cities they proffer serve only to demonstrate how much has changed in the quarter century since the book was first published.<sup>2</sup>

The authors' present a number of differences that define and shape cities in the two countries. I focus here solely on their arguments as they pertain to the politics and policy of urban development in cities, however. Goldberg and Mercer make the following three assertions: First, in Canada, there should be "considerably greater attention paid to planning and development controls" than in the US (Goldberg and Mercer 1986, 142); second, "Canadian cities should be more compact and have a different urban form from their American counterparts" (Goldberg and Mercer 1986, 143); and third, Canadian cities should show "a greater commitment to a public transportation system" (Goldberg and Mercer 1986, 147).

The basis for each of these claims are interrelated, but can be broken down into a cultural dimension and an institutional dimension. For the cultural dimension, Goldberg and Mercer note a number of substantive differences between the US and Canada. According to the authors, Canadians hold cities in higher regard than Americans. Canadians perceive cities as ideal locations to live, while Americans view them with distaste.<sup>3</sup> Canadians also have a greater trust of government than Americans, allowing for greater regulation. And, while Americans emphasise individuality, competition, and property rights, Canadians emphasise community and collective action.

For the institutional dimensions, the authors focus heavily on the notion that Canadian governments are more able and ready to intervene in urban affairs than in the US. With no protection in the constitution, Canadian cities are at the whims of their respective provinces. In contrast, and in keeping with the American sense of individualism, American cities enjoy greater autonomy from their respective states, including authority over urban planning. Also, due to fundamental differences between Canadian and American federalism, the federal government in the United States is much more heavily involved in cities than the federal government in Canada.

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<sup>2</sup> At the time, Goldberg and Mercer chose Pittsburgh as the main city for comparison with Toronto. They chose Pittsburgh because, as of the mid 1970s, its core city and metro were comparable in population to Toronto's. Today, the City of Pittsburgh's population sits at 305,000, while its metro contains over 2.3 million residents (U.S. 2010 Census). In contrast, the former City of Toronto already had a population of 676,000 people by 2001 (Canada 2001 Census), while the amalgamated city today has a population of 2.6 million, and a metro of anywhere between 5.6 to 6.6 million people, depending on one's definition (Canada 2011 Census).

<sup>3</sup> According to the authors, American 'distaste' for urban and central city living derives in part from the deep ceded racial tensions that persist in many American cities, and which is otherwise absent from Canadian cities. These persistent racial divides clearly distinguish many American cities from Canadian ones, and as a defining characteristic of many cities, should not be overlooked. However, since the mid-eighties, there has been a marked resurgence in the popularity of urban living in many American cities, particularly large cities like New York and Chicago. While in Canada, the downtowns of its major cities remain vibrant, the continued difficulty in establishing an 'urban agenda' at the federal and provincial level suggests that many Canadians are not enamored with the major urban centres in the country.

According to the authors, Canadians' trust in government allows for greater government intervention in planning. Greater intervention when coupled with strong limits to municipal authority accounts for the greater focus on planning and development controls in Canada (presumably at the provincial level). American's distrust for cities and their fragmented metros, a result of their emphasis on individuality, contribute to less compact cities than in Canada. A greater taste for urban living and stronger planning controls result in more compact Canadian cities. Finally, the compact nature of Canadian cities, emphasis on planning, and interest in urban living, result in an emphasis on public transportation. Whereas, in the United States, fragmented and segregated urban areas, coupled with direct federal subsidies to municipalities, result in automobile oriented cities with limited public transit options.

Section four directly addresses the three assertions I outline above: that *Canadian cities focus more on planning controls*; that *they are more compact*; and that *they have better transit services* than their American counterparts. However, before addressing these assertions, I will evaluate the authors' arguments regarding cultural and institutional differences between the two countries. Unlike Goldberg and Mercer, I eschew focusing on the aggregate/national level, for a focus on the city and provincial/state level. While the authors claim to make such a shift, they never examine the political culture of individual cities, nor do they examine institutional difference at the local or state/provincial level.

## **2. Political and Cultural Diversity in Canadian and American Cities**

Culture is an elusive term. Determining what counts as cultural norms is a difficult task on its own, let alone indentifying differences in political culture across multiple jurisdictions. To simplify things, and in keeping with the theme of this paper, I focus solely on political culture as it pertains to the politics of urban development in Canadian and American cities. The term 'political culture' is not pervasive in the discourse on urban politics and development in the US and Canada. Most of the literature on urban politics and development derives from behaviouralist and structuralist approaches (Stone 1989, and Logan and Molotch 1987, typify these two approaches respectively). Nevertheless, the concept of political culture is ever present. When Logan and Molotch (1987) discuss the growth machine, it is premised on a certain understanding of the interests and behaviour of political actors. The actors involved, their interests, and their actions constitute a political culture. Arguably, the growth machine is a form of political culture as it is the basis of norms that, according the authors, typify urban development politics in many American cities.

It is precisely American theories like the growth machine that Goldberg and Mercer's book suggest are inadequate or inappropriate when examining cities north of the border. If the growth machine typifies the practice and politics of urban development in American cities, political cultural differences in Canada should preclude its application in that country. However, there are examples in Canada, both in the past and present, where the growth machine theory appears to perfectly capture the dynamics at play in the politics of urban development of certain Canadian cities. At the same time, American scholars have demonstrated numerous instances in the Unites States where the concept of the growth machine does not capture the reality of local politics and urban development. It is easy to look at each country as a whole and identify prevalent cultural norms and patterns of behaviour that characterize and distinguish the two from each other. However, neither the US nor Canada are monolithic.

Beyond the City of Montreal, which has long held a distinctiveness born from the linguistic divide in the city, both the past and present political culture of urban development in the countries other three largest cities, Calgary, Toronto, and Vancouver, vary significantly, with each city sharing greater parallels with certain American archetypes, or shared/similar histories with specific cities or whole regions in the United States.

For instance, Max Foran's (2009) extensive account of the history of urban sprawl in Calgary depicts a city not far removed from Logan and Molotch's definition of the growth machine. Foran examines development in Calgary from 1945 and 1978, depicting a politics of urban development and planning where developers and local politicians worked closely to promote the exchange value of land in the ever expanding outskirts of the city. My own research suggests that Calgary planning policy is still largely determined through agreement between local politicians and developers, often involving little input from the city planners or the public (Moore 2011). While my own findings are based on limited data, they and Foran's account suggest that American theory may have something to say about the politics of urban development in Calgary.

Further east, the City of Toronto also went through an era typified by growth machine politics and planning. Up until the late 60s and early 70s, Toronto's powerful ward councillors worked closely with developers and their partners to determine the direction of growth in the City. However, by the late 60s and early 70s, city residents began to revolt against what they perceived as a pro-development/pro-growth city council. The city's denizens voted out many of Toronto's pro-growth councillors, and voted in mayors and councils that not only broke the alliance with developers, but placed significant restrictions on the height and density of development in the city. The growth of this anti-development/anti-growth movement reached its peak when neighbourhood residents successfully mobilised to prevent the continued constructions of the Spadina Expressway, which threatened to destroy both affluent and lower-income neighbourhoods in the old city (see Magnusson 1983; Caulfield 1974; Lorimer 1970). This period of time marked an important shift in the political culture of urban development in Toronto, as the affluent upper middle-class, traditionally a passive supporter of growth, emerged as a major opponent of developers and the status quo, a position that they maintain today in the city (Moore 2013).

What is particularly interesting about Toronto's story and the emergence of an anti-development group lead my upper middle-class homeowners is its lack of originality, and the location of cities with similar histories. There are numerous examples of the emergence and growth of middle-class anti-development/growth movements throughout the US. In his study of Los Angeles, Purcell (2000) discusses the emergence of anti-growth forces in Los Angeles, which, he argues, were lead by upper-middle class residents whose neighbourhoods were under direct threat of development. As in Toronto, these middle-class neighbourhood associations were able to lead a consortium of mixed-income neighbourhoods to defeat a pro-growth city council.<sup>4</sup> DeLeon and Powell (1989) and DeLeon (1992) outline a very similar course of events in San Francisco, again lead by middle-class neighbourhood movements. Some urban regime scholars have observed similar progressions in American cities as well. In fact, Elkin (1985) even notes how many of these movements coalesced around fights to prevent new highway development that would encroach on or destroy establish upper-middle class neighbourhoods (among others).

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike many American cities in the east, Los Angeles' executive and legislative institutions are also very similar to Toronto's, though the relative power of the mayor and ward councillors have varied through time

Thus while Calgary appears to typify a very "American" political culture of urban development, many American cities followed Toronto in developing a political culture revolving around the clash between private developers and strong upper middle-class neighbourhood associations. Calgary's political culture is characterized by a public that is *mostly* apathetic to issues of urban development.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Toronto's political culture, along with American cities like LA and San Francisco, is characterised by significant antipathy toward development amongst a heavily engaged upper middle-class citizenry.

Lastly, and without having conducted an exhaustive survey of all major cities in the US and Canada, the north-western seaboard of the US (Washington and Oregon) and British Columbia in Canada, seem to share their own unique political culture of urban development, one typified by a relatively harmonious relationship between developers, residents, and local politicians, and a culture strongly focused on public input into the planning process. In Toronto, though city planning and some city councillors have attempted to better include public decisions in planning, much of the early discussion over planning occurs between developers, city planners, and city councillors, behind closed doors, a practice not uncommon elsewhere. In Vancouver, community consultation is central to all planning, in comparison. Further, while disputes do regularly occur in the city, residents, the City, and developers are usually able to come to some form of mutual agreement on development.<sup>6</sup>

Although, in recent years, Seattle's local politicians have sought to curb the power of neighbourhood associations to influence planning in the city, the fact that were formally given a place in the planning process is indicative of a different mindset in that city, though the City's recent struggles with these groups suggests the latter may not be as willing to compromise as their Vancouver counterparts (Young 2003a; 2003b; Sommerfeld 2003). In Portland, Oregon, the developers themselves seem of a civic mind, and all participants in the politics of urban development in the city seem to share a similar vision for the city. In fact, in Oregon, most disputes over planning seem to revolve around disputes between the state and the municipality (Leo 1998; Liberty 1998).

As always, such a brief discussion and comparison across multiple jurisdictions will oversimplify the similarities and differences between cases. However, the cases I discuss above, simplified or not, suggest that a variety of political cultures pertaining to urban development exist in both the US and Canada, and that the border is not a determining factor in their distribution or development. Growth machines and apathetic communities can exist anywhere, while political cultures characterised by often intractable conflict between pro and anti-growth forces are present on both sides of the border. Lastly, in one cross-border region of the continent, an open and relatively congenial atmosphere seems to exist around urban planning and development, a political culture that may be specific to that region, but is not bound by country.

There are certain aspects of urban political culture that do distinguish American cities from their Canadian counterparts. The issue of race in the United States continues to play a significant and unique role in shaping American cities, for instance. However, it does not

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<sup>5</sup> The fact that, until recently, most of Calgary's development occurred at the city's fringes, away from established neighbourhoods, may explain its residents' relative apathy toward development issues.

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult, especially for someone living in Toronto, to grasp exactly what drives this greater civility in urban planning in Vancouver. The at-large system Vancouver employs for its council election, as well as its party system, may play an important role. It may be that residents in the city long ago won the battle against pro-growth forces in the city, though the pace of development in the city suggests otherwise. However, it does appear that both traditional sides of the anti-growth/pro-growth debate are more willing to work together and compromise in Vancouver (and Portland etc.), then elsewhere in the US or Canada.

preclude differences among American cities, nor similarities between American and Canadian ones. Again, the point is not to deny difference, but to demonstrate that, culturally, there is as much diversity *within* each country, as there is when crossing the border, and that features of urban political culture can cross boundaries.

### 3. Planning Institutions in the US and Canada

Hopefully, I cast some doubt on the notion of separate 'Canadian' and 'American' urban political cultures, at least within the realm of urban development. However, Goldberg and Mercer also make a very persuasive argument about the important institutional difference between the two countries. The differences they highlight are real and will inevitably pose some challenges for cross-border comparison, but, again, the authors are stuck examining the aggregate/national level while comparing the two nations.

Goldberg and Mercer (1986) focus on many of the most obvious differences between the two countries. For instance, they focus on the distinctions in Canadian and American federalism, how the former has become more decentralised overtime, while the latter has become more centralised. The greater centralisation in the US accounts, according to the authors, for the heavier involvement of the US federal government in local affairs when compared to Canada. This distinction is compelling, and few would argue against it. They also focus on the differences in property rights in the two countries. In the United States, property rights are almost sacrosanct. In fact, the United States' focus on property rights is one of its defining features globally, let alone in comparison to Canada. By contrast, Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes no mention of property rights. Again, this statement is not controversial.<sup>7</sup>

Both the United States Government's involvement in local affairs and the importance of property rights in the US play an important role in shaping urban development in American cities. However, neither play a determining role when comparing the politics and practice of urban development in the US and Canada. By focusing, once again, at the national level, Goldberg and Mercer have ignored significant diversity in the planning laws and institutions that exist at the state and provincial level in each country. The laws, regulations, and institutions that govern planning in each jurisdiction play a substantial role in shaping urban development in cities. The border seems to play only a minor role in this diversity and its distribution in each country.

There is significant diversity in the state/provincial legislation and institutions that govern planning. The degree of state and provincial government involvement in local and regional planning also varies significantly, and plays an important role in shaping the politics of urban development and policy-making. Traditionally, in the United States, state governments left urban planning to cities, which relied heavily on use of zoning. Zoning by-laws provide strict regulations for the use, size, and density of development in specific areas. The politics of planning revolved around the initial introduction of zoning..

Once in place, zoning was considered "virtually 'self-executing'" (Cullingworth 1993, 14). Planning departments, and their predecessors, were responsible for enforcing the zoning by-

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that American cities seem to have greater breadth of authority when using *eminent domain*, than Canadian cities have when using the similar power of *expropriation*. Though the court's ruling has been criticised, in the 2005 case *Kelo v. City of New London*, the Supreme Court of the United States reaffirmed a past ruling allowing municipalities to take land using eminent domain, and proceed to sell that land to private developers. I am unaware of an analogous use of expropriation powers in Canada.

laws, much like building inspectors enforce building codes. Zoning owes its existence, in part, to the racial tensions within the US. To avoid the influx of minority and lower-income groups into their neighbourhoods, middle-class white residents moved just beyond the border of central cities, establishing new municipality bodies with strict zoning by-laws prohibiting the construction of affordable housing. Despite these origins, the use of zoning by-laws is as commonplace in Canada today as it is in the US. Today, the only major city in either country never to adopt zoning by-laws is the City of Houston, which, not surprisingly, has its own distinct history of planning and politics of urban development (Thomas and Murray 1991)

Planning solely through zoning still exists in many American and Canadian jurisdictions (especially in smaller municipalities). However, the introduction of comprehensive planning altered the practice of planning in most major cities on both sides of the border. The intent of comprehensive or official plans<sup>8</sup> is to provide a long-range guide for the development of a municipality or other geographically bound area. Unlike zoning by-laws, comprehensive or official plans seek to direct how the city will develop, directing growth and the development of citywide infrastructure.

In most jurisdictions, comprehensive plans became the litmus test for determining the validity and applicability of zoning. For instance, in Nova Scotia, all zoning by-laws and by-law amendments must adhere to municipal planning strategies, the Nova Scotia equivalent to a comprehensive plan (*Municipal Government Act, 1998*). In the US, the State of Florida has similar requirements for its zoning-by laws (State of Florida 2006). Quebec takes it a step further, requiring all lower-tier municipal planning decisions to adhere to the equivalent of county level comprehensive plans (*Loi sur l'anénagement et L'urbanisme; Loi sue la commission municipale*). Thus, in intent, comprehensive plans play a similar role wherever they have been introduced in both countries. However, municipal authority over comprehensive planning, and the degree to which state or provincial governments are active in the planning process result in significant diversity when it comes to planning and the politics of urban development.

Some jurisdictions, like Georgia, strictly limit comprehensive plan amendments, which can severely restrict municipalities' planning authority (Gale 1992). In other states and provinces, municipalities must receive the approval of relevant state or provincial departments for all comprehensive plan amendments. In the State of Washington, municipalities require the approval of the Department of Community Development (Gale 1992). In Ontario, smaller municipalities require the approval of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. However, in other jurisdictions, municipalities can amend their comprehensive plans at will. This is the case in Maine and Oregon (Gale 1992), and is also the case for larger municipalities and regional municipalities in Ontario.

Similarly, some states and provinces are directly involved in the planning process, while others play a limited role. Some may directly intervene in planning, while others relinquish all authority. They can introduce planning guidelines with varying stringency. And, often, they will employ an intermediary or appeals body for planning disputes. For instance, though municipalities in Oregon can amend their comprehensive plans at will, the State can appeal these

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<sup>8</sup> Comprehensive plan is the most common term for these documents in the US, while official plan is the chosen nomenclature in Ontario and a few other jurisdictions. Other terms are also used in certain jurisdictions. The intent of such 'plans' is to provide a long-range guide for the development of a municipality or other geographically bound area. Unlike by-laws, which are very detailed and usually spot specific, comprehensive or official plans seek to shape how the city will develop, directing growth and the development of citywide infrastructure.



amendments to an appellant body called the Land Use Board of Appeal (Cullingworth 1993; Cullingworth and Caves 2009). In Florida, all comprehensive plans and amendments must adhere to the *Growth Management Act, 1985*. When disputes arise over conformity to the Act, the State employs the Division of Administrative Hearings to resolve the disputes (State of Florida 2006). In contrast, the State of Georgia, despite maintaining strict limits to comprehensive plan amendments, has limited involvement at the local level.

The same level of diversity exists in Canada. For instance, New Brunswick, much like Florida, employs its Assessment and Planning Appeal Board when disputes arise concerning the conformity of municipal planning decisions to the province's *Community Plan Act, 1973* (*Community Planning Act, 1973; Assessment and Planning Appeal Board Act, 2001*). Alberta also has an appeal body, as do all provinces except for British Columbia. However, in keeping with the Albertan government's limited involvement in urban planning, the Alberta Municipal Board has very limited authority, leaving Albertan municipalities relatively unrestricted when engaged in planning (Moore 2013).

These differences are not incidental. In fact, they can play a considerable role in shaping the politics of urban development in cities. My research into the politics of planning in Toronto demonstrated how influential the province's powerful appeals body, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), is in shaping not only the outcome of planning in the city, but the actual behaviour of actors involved in politics of urban development. In Toronto, the OMB, not City Council, has the final say on all planning issues, thus shifting both authority and the focus of political actors away from local politicians and toward the Board. Thus the politics of urban development in Toronto diverges from cities where local politicians hold all the authority over planning (Moore 2013). The same can be said for cities where state or provincial intervention into local planning is common, as is the case for cities in Oregon (Leo 1998).

Arguably, the major shortcoming of American theories of urban politics is their failure to account for such institutional variation, not their inability to cross boundaries. Growth machine theory seems to account for the politics of urban development in Calgary, but, without adjusting for the existence of the OMB, would be unable to account for planning politics in Toronto for the last two decades.<sup>9</sup> Without accounting for institutional differences, such theories would also not apply in many American cities. Significant diversity exists in the laws and institutions that govern planning at the state and provincial level in both countries. To definitely dismiss the role of the border in this instance would require a sweeping analysis of all or most of the planning institutions and legislation in each state and province--a task which is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, the limited survey I provide above does emphasise the importance of looking beyond the national/aggregate level when comparing urban development in each country. And, as with the discussion of political culture above, it suggests that some cities may share more in common with jurisdiction across the border than with those within the same country. Again, the boundary is not a barrier to comparison.

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<sup>9</sup> As with all institutions, the OMB has undergone many changes overtime. It did not always play such a central role in urban planning, which accounts for past parallels between Toronto and American cities like Los Angeles. In this case, a mixture of institutional and cultural change may explain the shift in Toronto politics. At the same time the OMB became more court like and focused on planning expertise, developers began turning to the Board more often in face of entrenched neighbourhood associations opposition and a reticent city council.

#### 4. Comparing the Built Form of Cities

Although Goldberg and Mercer (1986) spend at least half of their book detailing the institutional and cultural differences between the US and Canada, the strength of their argument lies not in attestations regarding the mindset of the average Canadian or in comparing parliamentary to presidential systems of democracy. Rather, the strength of the authors' argument derives from their economic, demographic, and geographic comparison of Canadian and American cities. The authors compare data on housing stock, building permits, and density, among other variables, to illustrate their main argument, that Canadian cities are fundamentally different from American cities.

The authors used their demographic analysis to test a number of statements or hypotheses that would confirm the distinctiveness of Canadian cities. Among these statements or hypotheses are the three assertions I mentioned above: first, that Canadians place far more emphasis on planning and development controls than Americans; second, that Canadian cities are more dense or compact than American ones, and have a distinct urban form; and third, that Canadian cities show "a greater commitment to a public transportation system" (Goldberg and Mercer 1986, 147). Goldberg and Mercer focus on both aggregate national data and comparison between individual cities.<sup>10</sup>

The authors' first statement, that Canadians place more emphasis on development controls, is a difficult one to test with limited time and data. Determining Canadian and American views on development and planning controls would require comparable polling data for both countries. I am not aware of the availability of such data. Examining the actual planning and development controls in place in American and Canadian cities could provide some evidence, though boundary and growth controls are only so strong as their enforcement. Again, I can only provide a limited survey of cases in the US and Canada, but it is clear that Canadian cities do not have a monopoly on controlling planning in development. In the US, significant literature exists examining the merits of planning tools like green belts and growth restrictions and their use in American cities.

The State of Oregon, in keeping with its history of active engagement in local planning, is well known for the array of tools and controls it implemented for controlling and shaping development, especially in Portland (Liberty 1998). And even as Goldberg and Mercer's book was being published, and movement was underway in many American cities and suburbs to curb growth and increasing traffic congestion (Downs 1988). The rise of middle-class neighbourhood associations as a foil to development interests is indicative of such a movement in the US (DeLeon and Powell 1989). However, Goldberg and Mercer do not suggest that American cities lack planning and development controls, only that Canadians place far more emphasis on such controls. Trying to determine how much relative emphasis is being placed in each country may be a losing proposition.

In light of the authors second statement, that Canadian cities are more dense and compact than American ones, it may be possible to look at the effect of planning controls on each side of the border, though such controls are not the sole determinant of city development. Goldberg and Mercer (1986) do just that. The authors examine, among other variables, the central density and

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<sup>10</sup> Some of the comparisons the author conduct are not easily replicable today, as the different economic trajectory of the two countries has led to a significant divergence in the volume of construction in each country. The different trajectories are largely due to the burst of the housing bubble in 2008, which decimated the construction and development industry in the US, while leaving most of Canada's major cities relatively unscathed.

density gradient of American and Canadian cities by regional aggregate, and by city size. Central density accounts for density of city centres in a city region. Density is represented by the number of people residing in a square mile or kilometer with the central city area. Density gradient accounts for the difference in density between the central area and the periphery, the greater the gradient, the greater difference in density between the centre and the periphery.

Goldberg and Mercer (1986, chap. 7) found that the central areas of Canadian cities were denser on average than American city centres, and that a greater proportion of the population of Canadian cities lived in the city centre than in American cities. That is, the density gradient of Canadian cities was significantly higher than that for American cities. This finding, along with their analysis of building permits and other data led the authors to conclude that Canadian cities were in fact denser and more compact than American cities. Unfortunately, the authors again choose to aggregate data, rather than focus on and compare individual cities, thus masking the possible diversity lurking in both nations.

More recent and in-depth analysis of major cities in the US and Canada, which does focus on individual cities, suggest that Goldberg and Mercer's conclusion is unfounded, at least if applied today. Fillion et al. (2004) compare Canada's three largest cities with twelve geographically dispersed cities in the US, using data from 1990. The authors found that when using certain measures, the three Canadian cities placed among the top in terms of density, suggesting some cross-border difference. However, the authors, for the most part, stress the importance of regional difference over national difference, suggesting that all three Canadian cities bore striking similarities to the cities from the Northern US seaboard. That authors also suggest that there was a period of divergence between American and Canadian cities from the 1940s to the 1970s (coincidentally the period Goldberg and Mercer focus on), but that since the 1970s, Canadian and American cities have begun converging again. Fillion et al.'s (2004) findings again suggest that there is just as much diversity within each country as between, and that cities on both sides of the border may have more in common with their cross-border counterparts than with cities within the same borders.

Finally, Goldberg and Mercer argued that Canadian cities have "a greater commitment to a public transportation system" than American cities (Goldberg and Mercer 1986, 147). Comparing transit systems across cities is not an easy task, as a city region can have multiple overlapping transit authorities. However, even with such limitations, Canadians clearly rely on transit far more than Americans. According to the American Public Transportation Association's most recent data, Americans made roughly 2.6 billion unlinked transit trips in the months of October, November, and December 2011. In contrast, Canadians made 600 million trips (APTA 2012). While the US had the higher number of trips, it had far fewer trips per capita than Canada. Americans average roughly 8.5 trips per person in contrast to the average of 18.5 for Canadians. Thus, Canadians are more than twice as likely to use transit than Americans. It is very difficult, in face of such findings, to argue against Goldberg and Mercer's contestation regarding Canadian cities' commitment to transit. However, ridership is more a measure of residents' attitude toward transit, than of a city's commitment to investing in it. The fact is that cities' focus on and investment in transit varies significantly through time.

Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal, for instance, have significantly higher ridership on their transit systems (the TTC and Metro respectively) than cities of the same size in the US. Both Canadian cities have average weekday ridership in excess of 2.5 million people per day. In the US, New York's MTA is the only system with higher ridership level (11 million a day). In contrast, the Chicago Transit Authority has an average daily ridership of 1.7 million trips

a day, while Los Angeles County's MTA has 1.4 million (all data from APTA 2012). However, the City of Toronto, until recently, has done little to expand its system's capacity in the last three decades, leading to significant overcrowding in many of its downtown stations. In contrast, Los Angeles has already begun building one of the most ambitious transit expansions in North American history. Funded by a sales tax implemented through referendum, the Los Angeles County MTA is on track to deliver 12 new transit lines or extensions of existing transit lines by 2019 (LACMTA 2010). At the other extreme, the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, metropolitan Boston's transit system, is near bankruptcy following the State's decision to unload all its transit-related debt onto the Authority (Kane 2009).

As with development controls and the built form of cities, one uncovers significant diversity when departing from the aggregate and focusing on cross-city comparison. There are some unique features to Canadian cities when compared to American ones. Canadian cities, on average, are denser, and have much higher transit ridership than comparable American cities. Nevertheless, there is limited evidence that Canadians are more willing to embrace planning and development controls than Americans, and it is very difficult to determine how invested individual American and Canadian cities are in investing in transit. This section reiterates the findings of the previous two sections. Neither country is monolithic. There are important points of divergence among cities within each country as there is much to compare between cities on each side of the border.

## 5. Conclusion

More than anything this paper demonstrates the risk of relying on aggregate national data to define the character of sub-national units. Goldberg and Mercer paint Canadian and American cities with broad swathes, masking the diversity within and similarities without. My own simplistic attempt to compare density in American and Canadian cities is a perfect illustration of this risk. I focused on the overall<sup>11</sup> density of urban areas with populations exceeding 100,000 people in each country.<sup>12</sup> I chose to look at both aggregate and city-specific data. My aggregate data were in keeping with Goldberg and Mercer's findings. In the US, the median density of urban areas with populations greater than 100,000 is 765 people per square kilometre. The density of all urban areas in the US combined is 1007 people per square kilometre. In contrast, the median in Canada is 1260 people per square kilometre, and the combined density is 1671 people per square kilometre. Based on this, albeit simple, analysis Canadian cities are much denser than their American counterparts.

However, when one moves from the aggregate to comparing individual cities, the difference is not so clear. The table below ranks a selection of American and Canadian cities by the density of their urban area. Canadian cities are in italics. While Canadian cities may be, on average, denser than American cities, there are plenty of dense cities in the US. The table demonstrates the substantial diversity among cities in both countries, which the aggregate data masked. Canadian cities are found at all points throughout the list. Aside from the ubiquitous low density of Atlanta, typical of the American south, which Fillion et al. (2004) also found, Canadian cities all have their American doppelgänger in terms of population, land area, and density.

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<sup>11</sup> My approach was simplistic because I could not distinguish the centre and periphery when measuring density.

<sup>12</sup> There are some limitations to such a comparison, as Statistic Canada's *populations centres* are only roughly equivalent to American *urban areas*.

<b>Urban Area/Pop. Centre</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Land Area (Km2)</b>	<b>Density (Pop per Km2)</b>
Los Angeles	12,150,996	4496.27	2,702.46
<i>Toronto (GTHA)<sup>13</sup></i>	<i>6,094,311</i>	<i>2286.04</i>	<i>2,665.88</i>
San Francisco	3,281,212	1356.17	2,419.47
San Jose	1,664,496	740.36	2,247.24
<i>Montreal</i>	<i>3,407,963</i>	<i>1545.30</i>	<i>2,205.40</i>
<i>Ottawa-Gatineau</i>	<i>933,596</i>	<i>501.92</i>	<i>1,860.10</i>
<i>Vancouver</i>	<i>2,135,201</i>	<i>1150.43</i>	<i>1,856.00</i>
Honolulu	804,459	440.74	1,820.72
Las Vegas	1,886,011	1079.61	1,746.94
Miami	5,502,379	3207.99	1,715.21
<i>Calgary</i>	<i>1,095,404</i>	<i>704.51</i>	<i>1,554.80</i>
<i>Winnipeg</i>	<i>671,551</i>	<i>449.82</i>	<i>1,492.90</i>
Fresno	654,628	443.61	1,475.67
Salt Lake City	1,021,243	719.73	1,418.92
Portland	1,849,898	1358.14	1,362.08
Seattle	3,059,393	2616.69	1,169.18
<i>Edmonton</i>	<i>960,015</i>	<i>855.32</i>	<i>1,122.40</i>
Dallas-Fortworth	5,121,892	4607.93	1,111.54
Atlanta	4,515,419	6851.43	659.05

Source: *Statistics Canada 2012*; U.S. Census Bureau 2012.

The aggregate data also masked regional differences. For instance, on average, urban areas in California are substantially denser than urban areas in the rest of the United States.

Goldberg and Mercer (1986) effectively argue against comparing Canadian and American cities because of the vast differences that define them. However, only by comparing individual cities does their diversity emerge. In fact, Goldberg and Mercer's entire book is premised on a comparison of Canadian and American political culture and institutions. Clearly, there is something to be gained through comparison. Of course, the authors were not opposing comparison, per se, but questioning the conflating of Canadian cities with American ones. They believed that Canadian cities were fundamentally different than American ones. The problem with this argument is that the authors were conflating all American cities and Canadian cities into two separate archetypes, thus committing the very error they were arguing against. They also did not allow for cross-border similarities, despite the fact that the two nations share a long history together, and at least one shared language. It is hard to believe that cities on each side of the border could grow entirely independently of each other.

The border is not unimportant. There are important cultural and institutional differences between the US and Canada. However, when examining the politics of urban development, there appears to be little reason to stop at the border. The political cultures, institutions, and built form

<sup>13</sup> Statistic Canada does not combine data for Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA). Thus, if a contiguous urban area includes multiple CMAs, the data will not be presented in aggregate. As a result, I combined the data for Toronto's CMA, and that of Hamilton and Ottawa CMAs to provide a better representation of the population and density in Toronto's city region. Toronto's population centre, as defined by Statscan, has the following characteristics: population: 5,132,794; land area: 1751.49; density: 2,930.50.

of cities in both countries are so diverse, we can only learn more by comparing them. Goldberg and Mercer were correct that many of the existing theories in the United States were incapable of accounting for such diversity. However, they would have written a much better book had they identified the diversity within both countries, something they could only have achieved through comparison of individual cities on both sides of the border.

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